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ABSTRACT

Pennsylvania's school districts and area vocational-technical schools are required to submit long range plans to the Pennsylvania Department of Education every 5 years. One of the required components of the planning process is the involvement of the community and staff in planning. This planning guide describes the standards that districts must meet, the activities to be performed to meet the standards, and the documentation that must be provided to exhibit compliance. The guide then discusses differences among districts and how those differences will affect the individual district's plans. Commonly asked questions about community and staff involvement in long range planning are posed next, and clarifications of the state regulations' purposes and requirements are provided in response. The guide then focuses on the role citizens' advisory committees can play in long range planning. The guide also lists questions that districts can use to help define their planning needs. Examples of worksheets for community and staff involvement are presented, and a planning checklist is provided. (PGD)

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RESOURCE GUIDE:

PLANNING FOR
COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION TO PLANNING
FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN LRP:
MAJOR OUTCOMES

"Community/staff involvement" is explicitly mentioned, or is assumed to exist, throughout the Long-Range Planning process. Positive change is more likely to occur in a district which involves its community (teachers, administrative staff, students, parents, school board members, organizations and agencies having an interest in the schools, citizens) in its planning in ways which develop general commitment to planned improvements. There is no one "way" to involve staff and community in LRP. Ideas can be adopted or adapted to meet the needs of a district. New ways can be developed. Preparation for community/staff involvement should occur during the Administrative Planning phase of LRP.

MAJOR
OUTCOMES

The major outcome of district activity in this phase of administrative planning is a plan which describes how the school staff and the community will be involved in LRP. The plan should describe specific approaches (committees, surveys, public meetings, communication channels) to be used, the general purposes of each approach and timelines for the specific activities proposed.

BASIC
TASKS

1. Examine current community/staff involvement practices.
2. Analyze potential alternatives.
3. Develop a plan for involvement.
4. Obtain approval for the plan.
5. Document the implementation of the plan.

REPORTING
REQUIREMENTS

The following documentation on community/staff involvement is requested by the LRP guidelines (Section 4):

IT IS ASSUMED THAT THE DISTRICT HAS RECORDS OF ALL LRP COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS, MEETINGS AND PARTICIPANTS ON FILE AND AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.

THE FOLLOWING ITEMS REQUIRE A WRITTEN RESPONSE:

- ITEM 1 - Describe specifically how the community, staff, students and others, have been identified, invited and selected for involvement at both the district and building levels. This should be based upon previous experiences with community involvement.
- ITEM 2 - Describe what actions were taken to assure that all interested persons had an equal opportunity to see and comment on the total plan before the board approved it.
- ITEM 3 - Summarize the district and building plans for continuing community/staff involvement. Activities include but are not limited to ongoing community/staff advisory groups for implementation and evaluation phases, community education programs, use of community volunteers and community-school dialogue programs.

The following points about planning for community/staff involvement in LRP should be emphasized:

1. It is recommended that community/staff involvement in LRP be viewed as an integral part of a district's ongoing community involvement program and not as a unique feature for purposes of meeting state requirements for long-range planning.
2. Districts should be encouraged to view the process of planning for community/staff involvement as an activity which will ultimately:
 - . improve overall school-community communication.
 - . increase public understanding and satisfaction regarding school operations.
 - . maintain or increase ongoing community and staff participation in the total school program.
 - . clarify community and staff roles in the educational process.
 - . create a shared sense of school and community.
 - . increase mutual school-community respect.
3. Preparation for involving community and staff in LRP will be more likely to succeed if consideration is given to the:
 - . development of a clear statement of district policy regarding community/staff involvement in LRP.
 - . examination of alternative methods for involving the community in LRP (surveys, public meetings, advisory committees, etc.).
 - . preparation of a description of the committees to be used along with the specific functions of each committee in the LRP process.
 - . development of a clear statement specifying the community/staff committee as advisory in nature.
 - . development of guidelines to be used for selecting representative community/staff members to work on LRP.
 - . delineation of committee governance and reporting procedures.
 - . specification of communication procedures among participants and with the community/staff.
 - . preparation of a general timetable of events or a work schedule to structure community/staff input.
4. Districts should be reminded that they need to submit summaries of plans describing "ongoing community/staff involvement" at the time that they submit their LRP action plans for priority program/services and management goals. (Guidelines, Section 4, Item 3.)

VARIATIONS IN PLANNING
FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN LRP

Variations will occur in the way districts involve community and staff in planning for and implementing LRP. Some of the variations reflect:

1. District traditions and practices. Districts have established different practices in working with the community. Some districts have a lengthy history of community involvement regarding a wide range of school- and community-related concerns, with established governance and communication procedures, including AVTS advisory and craft committees. Other districts may be less experienced with or less open to community input and will need information on potential community roles and encouragement to get the maximum from school-community interaction.
2. District size and resource capacity. Depending on size and resources, a district either may involve the community directly or may use the community in an advisory capacity. In the former case, the community can participate with school staff and share the work responsibility for preparation of all or parts of the LRP. This involves creation and funding of "working committees" who draft the plans, collect the data, write the reports, etc. In the latter case, the community can participate with school staff in an advisory capacity, to review and advise on various aspects of LRP. Community members are not involved in the actual work, but rather serve on "advisory committees" to review and comment upon data that has been summarized by district staff. In both cases, committee roles, responsibilities and limitations need to be specified clearly in writing.

Districts may elect one or the other of these alternatives or some combination of the two. Districts with a small central staff may find a variation of the first alternative helpful. Districts with a larger central staff might prefer to have staff members do the background preparation (with appropriate committee input) required to operate productive advisory committee meetings.

3. Management style. Differences in management styles of superintendents and school planning staffs will be reflected in the community/staff involvement planned by a district. District staff with more open management styles may choose to seek and facilitate broad-based staff and community input and may decentralize responsibility for decisions. Staff which is included to regulate input may exercise more control over community/staff selection procedures, the size of community representation on committees and committee roles in the LRP process.

Districts will vary in the nature of the committees, town meetings, surveys and communication procedures used. Technical assistance partners should assist districts to engage in a community/staff involvement process that relates realistically to the general preferences and needs of each district.

QUESTIONS REGARDING
COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN LRP

This section presents questions which districts have asked or are likely to ask about administrative planning for community/staff involvement, along with a suggested response to each question.

Ongoing Community Involvement and LRP

1. How does community involvement in LRP differ from ongoing community involvement?

They should be one and the same. For example, the Department of Education encourages districts to establish ongoing parent/community committees at both building and district level. These committees should represent various interest groups in the school community (e.g., members of special education, vocational education and entitlement advisory councils or committees; volunteers assisting in various district programs; PTAs/PTOs) and should engage in continuous interaction with each other and with district staff.

This policy reflects the fact that LRP is a continuous, ongoing, cyclic process. Districts regularly will be appraising needs and priorities, and implementing and evaluating specific action plans for improvements. Continuous interaction should be the norm, given the realities of time, money and other resources. Community involvement in the specific tasks related to development of a district plan should be viewed in the context of ongoing involvement.

2. What ongoing roles can the community play?

There are a number of ways in which community members may participate in the district's ongoing program and in the LRP process. Examples are:

- . Information.... receive and provide information about general school-related issues throughout the school year, including LRP plans.
- . Advising and Decision-Making.... participate in LRP building-level or district-wide committees and provide advice, recommendations and reactions regarding administrative planning, needs assessment, action planning, implementation and evaluation of improvement efforts.
- . Research and Evaluation.... serve as respondents in needs assessment procedures (surveys, town meetings, etc.) related to LRP.
- . Advocacy.... participate as members of PTA/PTOs, citizens groups and organizations, Title I Parent Councils, etc.

- . Planning and Development.... participate in the review, selection/development and implementation of instructional materials or programs, as members of standing curriculum/instruction committees and LRP advisory committees.
- . Direct Service.... participate in providing services to children (tutoring, cultural activities, recreation, community education resource), school staff (classroom assistance, bus monitoring, etc.) on an ongoing basis or in conjunction with specific LRP action plans.
- . Training.... serve as resources to provide training to students, staff and/or community in various areas (job-interview skills and procedures, time-management, second careers, community services, parenting, etc.).
- . Reviewing/Reporting.... provide consensus approval and support for LRP plans at each step in the process; review the progress of LRP, etc.
- . Dissemination.... disseminate information about general school programs and issues, LRP plans, etc. to peers and peer-groups.
- . Electoral Politics.... support candidates for school-related elective offices (school boards, councils).
- . Maintenance.... participate in basic school-related organizational functions such as fund raising, book and record maintenance, social activities.

Specific Approaches

3. What are some approaches that should be considered to involve the community and staff in LRP?

Four possible approaches can be identified:

- . advisory council or committee participation.
- . community/staff surveys.
- . public meetings or presentations.
- . ongoing contact through various communication channels.

4. What are the attributes of a good plan for involving the community and staff in LRP?

A good plan for involving the community and staff should answer the following questions:

- . What specific approaches (committees/councils, surveys, public meetings, established communication channels) will be used?
- . What purpose will each approach serve?

- . What steps will be required to implement each approach and when will they occur?
- . How will data gathered or shared be interpreted and used?
- . What format will be used to describe the district's action plan for ongoing community/staff involvement?

Advisory Committees/Councils

5. Generally speaking, how many committees with community representation are advisable for LRP?

Given the building-specific nature of the LRP process, committees composed of representative students, staff and community members can be formed for each building (or administrative unit), in addition to a district-wide committee. The number of members per committee should be determined by what is most productive, representative and manageable.

6. How should community and staff members be selected for LRP committees?

The ultimate goal in selecting community and staff members should be to achieve a representative balance of people across key interest groups, including single parents or community members who may not have children attending school. The following methods are most commonly employed:

- . open invitations to community and staff, with placement of all volunteers
- . open invitations to community and staff, with the board selecting "X" number of respondents to serve on the "steering committee" and "X" number to serve on various "study groups," "building committees," etc.
- . specific invitations to parent groups, business/civic organizations, local education association and student council, with placement of all volunteers.
- . core planning committee (superintendent, board member, long-range planning coordinator, etc.) specifies the interest groups to be represented on various committees and invites the groups to select and send "X" number of representatives
- . any combination of the above.

Most districts use some form of central steering or advisory committee composed of a cross-section of community members, school staff and students and several subcommittees organized either by building or by some task or study problem. Use of existing staff committees for some aspects of LRP is common.

7. What information is available from the technical assistance partners on forming and running advisory councils?

LRP regional directors, intermediate unit LRP advisors, PDE field representatives and participating college and university coordinators can provide information and examples about community/staff involvement. Also, the PDE Resource Center has available a number of resources pertinent to advisory council formation, operation and governance.

8. What procedures are best for replacing community/staff members who drop out of LRP committees?

It is generally recommended that an agreement be made with the interest groups involved to accept the responsibility to select their own replacement when one of their members decides he/she is unable to continue to work on a specific LRP committee. Committee members should have the right to resign at any time, given the understanding that their group will replace them. The life-span of any committee is determined by district need.

Surveys

9. Is it necessary to do a survey of the community for LRP?

Not necessarily. If the district has surveyed the community recently and has current data that relates to the purpose of LRP, another survey may be redundant.

10. What information is available from the technical assistance partners on designing and conducting surveys?

The technical assistance partners have access to a number of practical materials on conducting surveys.

Public Meetings

11. What role can public meetings play in LRP?

Districts routinely hold various types of public meetings. These can be useful to LRP in at least four ways:

- . To share LRP information.
- . To air issues.
- . To obtain community input.
- . To provide person-to-person exchange.

Public meetings where issues are discussed or input obtained require preparation to keep group processes organized, discussion topics focused and data collection systematic and bias-free.

Communication Channels

12. What communication channels should districts consider to facilitate community/staff involvement in LRP?

In general three basic communication channels should be included to facilitate community/staff involvement in LRP:

- . Direct Contact. Parents, non-parents, community groups and staff can be encouraged to attend meetings at the school to obtain information or provide input on various aspects of LRP.
- . School Publications. LRP fact sheets, progress reports, findings, etc. can be distributed through newsletters. Innovative approaches should be considered.
- . Public Media. Systematic use should be made of community newspapers, radio and television to publicize LRP planning and implementation.

General Recommendations

13. What are some general recommendations regarding community/staff involvement?

A number of suggestions can be offered regarding the involvement of community and staff in long-range planning:

- . conduct the process in as open a fashion as possible.
- . involve school board members at the outset and obtain some involvement from them throughout the planning process.
- . involve the community and professional staff jointly in planning and communicating.
- . orient all participants thoroughly on their respective roles and limitations.
- . assign one person in the district for overall monitoring of community/staff involvement.
- . call on the assistance of LRP partners when necessary.
- . make provisions for periodic reports to the local press on the planning process.
- . provide a copy of the overall LRP administrative plan outlining deadlines, major responsibilities of committees and individuals, etc., to community and staff.
- . assure that every section and the final copy of the long range plan is reviewed by community and staff.
- . assure that the entire completed plan is made available in a public meeting or series of meetings prior to its adoption by the school board, with reasonable time allowed for review by community and staff.

WORKING WITH CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEES*

A successful, effective citizens advisory committee is most often identifiable in a district where the superintendent and board have charged the committee with a specific task, indicated the date for the committee to begin work and set the date for the committee to disband.

Care and caution must be taken in using a citizens advisory committee. It is not another board of education; it is not a surrogate board, nor is it intended to displace or replace board thinking, board action or board responsibility.

When the committee is formed, members must be told where the money is coming from to fund the work they are asked to do, where they are to get help, who is to be the liaison with the superintendent and board and what resources are at their disposal.

What to Do

- . Publish qualifications for membership on the committee.
- . Decide whether the committee is to be appointed, elected or otherwise selected from volunteers.
- . Give the committee a major purpose, objectives, guidelines, dates to begin and end.
- . Provide orientation for committee members.
- . Decide if the committee is to be district-wide or if it will serve a particular school attendance area.
- . Make clear that the extent of the committee's authority is advisory only.
- . Encourage the committee to record and keep detailed notes of all meetings.
- . Appoint a liaison person to communicate between the committee and the superintendent and/or board.
- . Keep committee members informed so that they may function effectively.
- . Provide the means for the committee to communicate with all citizens.
- . Provide suitable quarters for committee meetings.
- . Make certain that public notice of all committee meetings is made in advance so that interested citizens may attend. All meetings should be open to the public.

*(Excerpts from: Turning the Tide Parent Involvement Book, pp. 22 and 23.)

Problems

- . Apathy in the community and among committee members after the first blush is gone.
- . Too much time required of committee members who have jobs, other obligations.
- . Difficulty in scheduling meetings convenient to majority.
- . Domination of committee by one individual or a pressure clique.
- . Keeping the committee on the subject--not allowing it to get involved in side issues.
- . Getting qualified citizens to serve on the citizens advisory committee.
- . Finding ways to train the committee to do its job.

ADDITIONAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS
FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN LRP

Considerations to help guide a district's thinking in each of the areas related to community/staff involvement are given below.

Advisory Council or Committee Considerations

1. How many councils or committees will be formed?
2. What tasks or functions will the councils/committees perform?
3. How will community and staff members be selected?
4. How will members be oriented to their tasks?
5. What will be their relationship to the school board, school administration, total school staff and local public?
6. What representation is appropriate for each committee?
7. How will they be governed?
8. What timelines should be set?
9. How will committee results be documented and publicized?

Survey Considerations

10. At what stage of long-range planning will the survey be implemented?
11. What questions will be asked, and for what purpose?
12. What audience will be surveyed? (Students, board, staff, parents, citizens, etc.)
13. What sampling procedures will be used?
14. What survey methods will be used (interview, telephone, mail) and what will be the format (open-ended, yes-no)?
15. How will the data be processed?
16. What resources will be required?
17. How will the survey report be written and used?

Public Hearing or Meetings Considerations

18. What information will be presented and discussed, and for what reasons?
19. Who will be invited?

20. How many meetings will be needed?
21. Where and when?
22. How will the meetings be publicized?
23. What materials will need to be prepared?
24. How will the meetings be conducted?
25. What outcomes are desired of the meetings and why?
26. How will the outcomes be used?

General Communication Procedures for LRP:

27. What communication channels with the total public will be used?
(external)
28. What communication channels with the total staff will be used?
(internal)
29. What timelines are required for communication activities and how do these affect overall LRP administrative planning?
30. How will the outcomes of committee meetings, surveys or public meetings be documented?
31. How will they be publicized?
32. What resources will be needed specific to communication procedures?
33. What format will be used to describe ongoing community/staff involvement for LRP, and what committee or staff members will be responsible for organizing the action plan?

EXAMPLES OF WORKSHEETS
FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN LRP

Planning for community/staff involvement in LRP can be viewed as occurring in several stages. During the first stage, district staff are likely to assess the current PDE requirements for community involvement in LRP and evaluate the pros and cons of the district's past LRP community involvement effort. Worksheet #1 is an example of one way of presenting results in this initial analysis and review stage.

The second stage of community/staff involvement planning is likely to involve a review of the general procedures and alternatives open to district for community involvement in the LRP process (along with an appraisal of the specific tasks that will be involved if a given approach is selected) and an assessment of the current status of ongoing community involvement in the district. This stage involves discussion of the feasibility of one method versus another and consideration of the specific sub-tasks involved. Worksheets #2 and #3 are examples of ways of evaluating approaches and describing the specific tasks involved.

PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT WORKSHEET #1

ASSESSMENT OF PAST EFFORTS:

-
- | | |
|--|---|
| . Description of approach used by district in past LRP effort. | . Key tasks/responsibilities assigned to community/staff groups in past effort.

1.

2.

3.

4. |
| . Appraisal of strengths and weaknesses of past community/staff involvement efforts. | . List of key things that the district might do differently. |

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT REQUIREMENTS:

- . Brief description of the current PDE requirements for community/staff involvement in LRP. (Supporting materials attached)

PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT WORKSHEET #2

District Ongoing Community/Staff Involvement Programs

PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

Existing community/staff groups (or programs) should not be overlooked in LRP planning. Will advocates of various community groups play a role in LRP?

ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND OTHER GROUPS CURRENTLY ACTIVE IN THE DISTRICT . . . AND . . . DISTRICT PLANS FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN LRP . . .

PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT WORKSHEET #3

Tentative Schedule of Work

TASK AREA _____

<u>Task/Activity</u>	<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Task Leader</u>	<u>Resources Required</u>	<u>Other</u>

PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY/STAFF INVOLVEMENT CHECKLIST

Completion Checklist

- | | | |
|--------------|--|-------|
| Question #1 | The current requirements for community/
staff involvement in LRP have been
determined. | _____ |
| Question #2 | A review of the district's past LRP
community involvement effort has been
conducted. | _____ |
| Question #3 | Alternative approaches available to
involving community/staff in the LRP
process have been examined. | _____ |
| Question #4 | An analysis of the ongoing community/
staff involvement efforts of the district
has been conducted. | _____ |
| Question #5 | A general district plan for community/
staff involvement in LRP has been
outlined, reviewed and revised. | _____ |
| Question #6 | The plan provides for community/staff
input throughout the five sections of LRP. | _____ |
| Question #7 | Administrative and staff assignments
have been made to implement the plan. | _____ |
| Question #8 | The community at-large has been apprised
of the plan. | _____ |
| Question #9 | A format has been chosen for reporting
the district's ongoing community involvement
plan. | _____ |
| Question #10 | The potential barriers or problems you
might encounter in implementing the plan
have been thought through and alternative
courses of action considered. | _____ |
| Question #11 | There is a plan to provide feedback to
those involved, regarding the results of
their input. | _____ |